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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [KN](#) [JA](#)
SUBJECT: JAPANESE CONSERVATIVES: USING THE NUCLEAR CARD
WITH THE U.S.?

Classified By: Consul General Daniel Russel, reasons 1.4 (B)(D)

Introduction

¶1. (C) Former Cabinet Security Chief Atsuyuki Sassa, an influential member of the conservative Japanese establishment, in remarks to a large gathering in Osaka called for Japan to periodically use its potential "nuclear weapons card" to shore up security assurances from the United States and to intimidate North Korea and China. Sassa was also markedly critical of USG policy in East Asia in his remarks to the closed audience of opinion makers in western Japan. The speech, sponsored by the conservative newspaper Sankei Shimbun, was covered in highly edited form by the Sankei--minus the more controversial comments. Sassa, repeatedly saying he was going off the record, spoke freely in front of the all-Japanese audience, which included a ConGen Osaka FSN. His comments are a glimpse of what some Japanese conservatives are saying about the U.S. when they think we are not listening.

The Nuclear Card

¶2. (C) Sassa praised last year's remarks by LDP Policy Research Committee Chairman Soichi Nakagawa in support of Japanese possession of nuclear weapons. Although Sassa clearly stated that Japan has no intention to actually possess nuclear weapons per se, he emphasized that Japan benefitted from using the idea of nuclearization as a negotiating tactic with neighboring countries, "in particular the United States." He pointed out that after Nakagawa's remarks, Secretary of State Rice immediately came to Japan to reconfirm the U.S. basic policy of protecting Japan under its nuclear umbrella. In his view this was a tremendously successful gambit for the GOJ. At the same time, Sassa emphasized that Japan should continue to develop its own independent defense system to guard itself against foreign missile attacks while under U.S. protection. He also favored brandishing the prospect of a nuclear Japan to bolster Japan's defensive posture vis-a-vis the DPRK and China.

13. (C) Another theme of Sassa's speech was that if the Korean peninsula were to reunify, even under ROK control, Japan must strengthen its independent defense capacity. Sassa said PM Abe was currently undertaking that effort. He felt that the amendment of the Japanese Constitution was critical to Japan improving its own defenses and maintaining its "honorable position" in the international community.

Critical of Rice, Hill

14. (C) Sassa also lamented the "expulsion" of pro-Japanese figures from the Bush Administration, naming James Kelly, Michael Green, Richard Armitage, and Colin Powell. He made disparaging remarks about Secretary Rice for having "no knowledge or constructive opinions on East Asian matters." Sassa also strongly criticized EAP A/S Chris Hill as being a patsy for the North Koreans--meeting with them frequently without much to show for it.

15. (C) Bio Note: Sassa, a member of a Japanese government advisory National Security Committee (Kokka Anzen Iinkai), was the first Director of the Cabinet Security Office, established by former Prime Minister Nakasone. He is a prominent speaker and writer on crisis management and defense issues. He is famous for spearheading the operation against the Japanese Red Army in 1972 as a police official. As such, his remarks carry weight among mainstream conservative Japanese figures. End Bio Note.

16. (C) Comment: Against the backdrop of increased diplomatic activity between the USG and the DPRK, and given Rep. Honda's

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nonbinding resolution in Congress criticizing Japan on the so-called comfort women issue, a growing number of conservative political interlocutors are telling ConGen they fear that the U.S.-Japan alliance has begun to drift. ConGen is hearing from these interlocutors that they are increasingly doubtful that America would come to Japan's aid if attacked by North Korea or China. End Comment.
RUSSEL